



2020 **EPISTLES**
FROM
FRIENDS
AROUND THE WORLD

Friends World Committee for Consultation

fwcc.world/epistles-from-quaker-groups-from-around-the-world

Ann Britton NSWRM

Greetings Friends.

My name is Ann Britton. I am a member of Kiama Recognised Meeting.

I wish to acknowledge the Traditional Owners, past, present and emerging of the Tharawal nation, of the land on which I live, work and worship.

GREETINGS TO FRIENDS EVERYWHERE

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“Greetings To Friends Everywhere”

Friends around the world cherish the notion that we can hear from each other about how we are going; what has challenged us, what sustains us, and how the Spirit has prospered among us each year.

Through our ‘Greetings to Friends Everywhere’ we reach out to each other to develop and maintain our strong sense of community.

Epistles were historically and continue to be an important way for Friends to learn about each other in that which is eternal.

They help us appreciate that we are part of a world family of Friends.

We are blessed with the opportunity to be able to immerse ourselves in our many Quaker epistles from around the world through the Friends World Committee for Consultation, which can be accessed through our quakersaustralia.info website.

Epistles on the site are organised by calendar year.

Some are stand-alones, while others include epistles from many groups within the meeting in one document, but most importantly, each gives us an insight into the Spirit of the meeting from which we are hearing.

Themes which resonated for me:

young people

peace

environment

justice & equality

despite our many differences,
our concerns are similar

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In preparing for this year's Summary of Epistles, I read and sat with contributions dating from 1 June 2019 through to 31 May 2020.

The themes which spoke most strongly to me were based around recognition that regardless of our many differences we have more similarities – concerns for environment, justice and equality for everyone regardless of beliefs, race, gender or sexual orientation, our desire to nurture and include our young people and allow them to lead us, and for peace.

Wilmington YM(25-28 July)

**“We re-member
the body, “
“learning from
our
differences”
as we “take
comfort in our
similarities”.**



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Friends may recall from David Tehr’s Summary last year the struggles facing Wilmington Yearly Meeting’s internal divisions.

Now they speak of how their ‘new normal’ is developing since their split.

They tell the story of Urikami Cathedral in Nagasaki, destroyed by an atomic bomb dropped on August 9, 1945, during mass, killing all those present.

The cathedral cross was photographed intact in the rubble shortly after the bombing. When the Cathedral was rebuilt in 1959, members of the Nagasaki Peace Association looked for it.

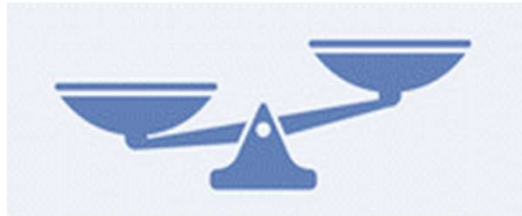
Wilmington College became aware that since 1982 it had held a wooden cross removed from the rubble of the cathedral.

When their Peace Center’s director Tanya Maus learned of Nagasaki’s search, she and Campus Minister Nancy McCormick gave the cross back to the Urikami congregation on August 7 2019, almost exactly 74 years after the bombing.

This proud and loving opportunity was recognised as symbolic of new life springing from vulnerability and pain.

Wilmington YM(25-28 July) continued....

Creative tension in the
demands of
love and justice



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The plea of all Friends for love and justice remains the same.

Wilmington's epistle points out that **sometimes in loving our neighbour, we may ignore the demands of justice;**

On the other hand, if the person is not someone to whom we have an emotional attachment, we might allow grief and hurt to narrow our focus so that although 'right' in fact, we choose justice without attending to love.

In their Peace Lecture Friends were encouraged to :

"Go deep within to seek the Spirit and how it leads you to what you and we are called to do.

The marks of the Spirit will be strength and compassion. Clarity will come."

Regardless of our differences across the world or within our own meeting, our own lives, Wilmington's epistle shows us how to "re-member" our similarities.

Baltimore Yearly Meeting 8th Month 4th Day 2019



Gardening is doing
the work
to create conditions
for a seed to do what
it already knows how
to do.

6

Baltimore Yearly Meeting Friends recognised and understood that in order to be whole we must grow by creating conditions to make our Meetings more inclusive and welcoming to all, encouraging participation and leadership among all Friends, to build an anti-racist, multicultural community.

I really loved their gardening reference because 'seed-planting' is a goal in many of my relationships.

Switzerland YM (7-10 June)



“If you want peace, you don’t talk to your friends. You talk to your enemies.”

Desmond Tutu

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Not surprisingly, Switzerland’s epistle spoke to Friends’ ongoing concern for peace, quoting Quaker Faith and Practice:

“I have heard some Friends deny their anger in a silent ‘peace’ where there is no understanding of each other.

If we are angry we know how wars develop.

It does not matter who’s wrong.

“How do we become reconciled to each other if we are asunder?

All I can say is to go up to that person and say what is in your heart; that their ways are hurting but you still love them. This is where peace lies.”



2362.webp

Western YM (Indiana USA) 25-28 July

“Unleash the Love, Release the Power!”

The need for ongoing support of individual members of meetings which have been laid down, those who are living in distant locations



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Indiana USA's Western Yearly Meeting theme had a strongly evangelical flavour, yet shares similar concerns to those facing us in Australia, specifically how we manage our tyranny of distance.

Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting and
Association June 13-16 2019

“Seek the Light - Act Boldly”



Since we are struggling with many changes
both Light and boldness are much needed

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Southern Appalachian YM reported that “YAFs and adults sought Light on a deep-delving query: “How do you balance boldness and sensitivity in dealing with sensitive issues?”. Its a challenge to social justice we all face.

They see that while “deeply invested in support for becoming anti-racist in our practices, we are aware how far we have to go, and how much we want to continue to integrate what we learn together in our regular practice and community life.”

This speaks very much to how my own meeting in Kiama is feeling as we begin to learn more about our Aboriginal history.

Epistola dai Quaccheri in Italia 2019

**Hospitality in the
Quaker tradition ...
an Italian twist on
Meeting for Eating.**



**The starting point for becoming open to the Spirit
& aware of the divine presence among us.**

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Epistola dai Quaccheri in Italia 2019 duemiladiciannove sent an irresistibly delicious epistle.

Italian Friends noted the importance of providing convivial spaces to bitter enemies, choosing a dinner table to signify the importance of being together while separate, to strive to resolve conflict.

They reflected on instinctive reactions when someone moves into what we perceive as “our” space, and challenged the narrative of “scarcity” of space and resources.

There is space for everyone, and it must be shared, to meet everyone’s basic life-supporting needs, rather than individual potentially never-ending ‘wants’.

Great Plains Yearly Meeting 30 May-2 June 2019

Love is not a thing;
it's a thing that does.



We want to be
doing our best,
not our most.

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Great Plains Yearly Meeting is similar to AYM in the challenge to replace Friends who are due to lay down their roles, and discerning ways to maintain small meetings into the future, in keeping with our **Quaker testimonies of equality, peace, and community, while extending grace, inclusion and love to all.**

Monteverde Friends Meeting, Costa Rica 2 June 2019



Meeting is a special time.
We never know what seeds
are planted.

Making our lives a living testimony challenges us to balance our needs as a meeting, of the community around us, and of the world community.

12

Monteverde Friends epistle was the shortest offering to our world community this year, but it spoke strongly to my condition, reminding me of our own Advice and Query no. 30, that what is required of us may not be great busyness.

Our Quaker testimony to simplicity appears to be key to the activities of this meeting – they dwell on the importance of silence and ministry, and **the value of community, of give and take, flexibility and open mindedness.**

Illinois Yearly Meeting 19-23 June 2019

Our small children overcame
their fears of a frog by naming it
“Sweetheart”



Older children
made Leopold benches for seating
for evening campfire sessions

“Keeping Courage and Faithful Focus in a Crisis-driven Society”

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I decided to include Illinois Yearly Meeting in my presentation for the simple charm of the littlies dealing with fear in a practical manner – by naming it.

The older kids made more tangible use of their time – manufacturing Leopold benches, which were new to me.

Google shows how to master the fine art of making your own Leopold bench, as designed by Aldo Leopold the naturalist!

The evening introductory lecture by Amelia Kegan no doubt speaks to the condition of many Friends around the world as we confront the threats of Covid-19, and escalating tensions around issues of social justice, when she spoke of “Keeping Courage and Faithful Focus in a Crisis-driven Society.”

Lake Erie Yearly Meeting July 25-28 2019

A world with needs that leave us, at times, hopeless and despairing.

Struggling to live with the damage and our complicity.

Unsure how to balance comfort & challenge in our lives.

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Lake Erie YM considered their emotional response to so many confronting challenges and the enormity of our task;

“We face the uncertain future not afraid and not alone.

Puzzled sometimes and often tired but willing to try in love, in kindness, in hope and grace.

We are finding our way step by prayed step.’

These emotions which speak strongly as we consider ways forward environmentally, and in attempting to make the good the damage done to the Aboriginal nations of Australia.

General Meeting of Friends in Mexico 16-17 November 2019



Youth in our Meetings and Churches: how to invite them in, nurture them, and of course, hang on to them.

The young people themselves coloured this gathering, planting it firmly in a spirit of celebration and friendship.

15

Mexico Friends concentrated on nurturing community, through consideration of the universal concern of encouraging younger Friends, having fun and relaxing together over food and social activities, so that they could report that throughout their General Meeting “we felt happy, at ease, peaceful and grateful, and comfortable, like being among family.”

The Children's Program of Ohio Valley
Yearly Meeting
19-23 June 2019



We shared our concerns about not being heard and how to speak up in a kind way so people will listen.

16

The young people of Ohio Valley voiced their thoughts about being included in words which echoed those used in AYM last year.

Pacific Yearly Meeting 12-17 July 2019

Looking truthfully at hurdles to undoing the harm in our hearts by our life-denying culture and lack of racial justice



Even if we are a very old tree we are still living and growing and that is cause for joy

17

Pacific Yearly Meeting faces the same dilemmas as many Quaker meetings, two of which spoke to me; the challenge of coming to terms with historical injustices; and our declining numbers, posing difficulty for Friends, a people who do not evangelise.

They were asked to consider one of the hardest questions of all: “are we dying?”

“Our numbers are half what they were some years ago and in our Monthly Meeting State of the Meeting reports, and many Meetings do not say anything about children's programs at all.”

Consider the powerful image of great trees, rotting from the inside in their later years, but still putting out new growth each spring and still nurturing the world around them.”

Canadian Yearly Meeting The Committee of Joy 2-10 August 2019

How our settler minds used the Bible to rationalize domination and exploitation of First Nations Indigenous hosts and their land.

We can choose to re-examine our tradition to unite in a radical vision of reparations and equitable land redistribution.

18

I found it interesting that Canadian Yearly Meeting held daily Bible study sessions directed toward theme of reconciliation, with tasks confronting them similar to those we as Australian Friends now encounter, while recognising how the Bible has been used in the past to subjugate First Nations peoples.

Expanding on their commitment to reconciliation as a practice, a highlight of Canadian Yearly Meeting was the LGBTQ2+ evening, particularly Lara Rae's speaking of "Coming Out with Grace: Gender Transition as Spiritual Practice."

Alaska Friends Conference 1-4 August 2019

Consider how our Quaker history has contributed to divisions, intolerance, and white supremacy



We discern a need for healing work to confront past actions, including those of Friends, that devalued and damaged indigenous cultures

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Alaska Friends covered all the bases – acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which they met, and looking to discern more meaningful and effective integration of youth and young adult Friends into the life of the meeting. They renewed their commitment to “love thy neighbour” with no exceptions.

They are acutely aware of and concerned about visible and destructive consequences of climate disruption: delayed formation of sea ice resulting in dramatic winter storm damage to the coastline; salmon perishing in unprecedented warm river waters before they reach their spawning grounds; more and larger wildfires triggered by more frequent lightning and fanned by unseasonable winds

However, Alaskan Friends also managed to one-up Australian Friends in the natural disasters competition – they were happy to celebrate the new foundations of their meeting house withstanding a Richter 7.1 earthquake with an epicentre just 10 miles away. We are unlikely to better that record here!

North Pacific Yearly Meeting 17-21 July 2019

“Normal” is morally and spiritually bankrupt

Privilege and comfort numb us

Individualism is misguided - we need community

We cannot face climate chaos, racism, any of the world's deep problems, alone

Junior Young Friends invited reflection on our beliefs & values for ourselves, others & the earth

Their honesty continues to guide us

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North Pacific Yearly Meeting encapsulated all of our themes.

“Normal” is morally and spiritually bankrupt.

Privilege and comfort numb us

Individualism is misguided - we need community.

We cannot face climate chaos, racism, any of the world's deep problems, alone

Their Junior Young Friends invited reflection on our beliefs & values for ourselves, others & the earth

Their honesty continues to guide us

Philadelphia Yearly Meeting 23-28 July 2019

All of us live in the heart of God
with the help of others.
Friends desire to remain
teachable as imperfect people.
We continue to stumble forward
as we seek to hold each other
and invite you to hold us
in trust and love



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Philadelphia Yearly Meeting is one of the oldest of Quaker Yearly Meetings, and yet they acknowledge that the impact of racism has forced them to recognise personal presumptions, and the often invisible culture of privilege, contrary to the leadings of Spirit.

They accept accountability for the real hurt experienced by Friends of colour, a position echoed by Australian Friends.

NORWAY YEARLY MEETING 27-30 June 2019

High school students were strongly active on climate this spring, in the spirit of our testimonies, inspiring us to rediscover & reaffirm our Quaker voice



If our load is heavy, we can take some of the stones we carry out of the pack to build beacons.



22

Norway YM were strongly inspired by the activities of the young on climate change; reminding us that :

“To have our hearts and minds prepared is to meet life with openness and wonder. We must preserve "the joy, the spark, the spectacular" in life, and at the same time conserve ourselves with slowness – breathing in and breathing out.

If our load is heavy, we can take some of the stones we carry out of the pack to build beacons.”

New York Yearly Meeting 21-27 July 2019

We gather in wonder
at the power of God's love
to transform us inwardly
and unite us
in pursuit
of a more compassionate world.



23

New York Yearly Meeting proudly began their epistle by explaining that they, like us, are queer and straight, trans and cis, young and old, differently abled, people of all colours, with origins in many lands, bearing legacies of dispossession and harm that we struggle to redress, along with bounties of love and care and gratitude for the diverse truths that we bring together.

They joined in thankfulness for the divine love that infused at once their joyful gathering and their shared striving for justice and renewal.

They considered' a recommendation to divest as a Yearly Meeting from fossil fuels; heard urgent calls to rise together to protect immigrants and refugees; and were reminded again of the pressing need to undo white supremacy structurally in the larger society, in our religious society, and personally.

France Yearly Meeting October 2019

Quakers are '*practical mystics*' who discern "*what love demands of us*", and whose actions arise from '*the promptings of love and truth in our hearts*'

Our greatest witness is always our own lives

24

France Yearly Meeting noted the spiritual basis for our practical responses, reminding us that any action in the name of our society starts as a 'concern' from a member or small group, not from an institutional decision. The phrase "practical mystic" grabbed my attention, exemplifying the personal responsibility we each have for influencing the direction of our Society.

Britain Yearly Meeting 24-27 May 2019

The exclusion we may create is not intentional but it doesn't mean we aren't responsible for it.



'Light' may not be warm and comfortable but a spotlight exposing our vulnerability, complicity and fear

25

Britain Yearly Meeting thought deeply about looking through the lens of privilege for climate justice, and diversity and inclusion, while being aware of the risk of becoming mired in introspection without addressing the challenges these present. The word 'privilege' was used in two distinct ways in Yearly Meeting; as a blessing we experience, and, as the unearned advantages a person can inherit from birth and/or accumulate over time.

We need to be aware of the ways in which we can simultaneously have, and lack, privilege.

They encourage us to begin to understand what it means to be in unity with others and with the whole of creation, acting out of love rather than duty or fear.

It's all about Love.

Intermountain Yearly Meeting June 9-16 2019

Our kind of faith requires practice;
it is a verb, not a noun.



An exceptional community
plants trees
under whose shade
they may never sit.

26

Intermountain Yearly Meeting reiterated the themes of many meetings – beginning with an acknowledgment “with humility and respect” of the many generations of Pueblo peoples and their ancestors.

One of their speakers commented that there is a “now” and a “not yet” dimension to seeking justice:

“now” because we can make decisions every day that support our vision of a world more hospitable to truth and peace;

“not yet” because this work takes time. Lots of time, and we may not get to see the results.

Belgium & Luxembourg YM 15-17 November 2019

Living adventurously, guided by the Light

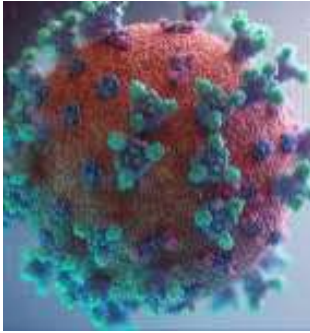
Our relationship with people is essential to our Faith...remembering that we “might be mistaken” in our failure to adequately address issues such as gender, racial and sexual orientation equality

Things start to change with that discomfort

27

Belgium & Luxembourg were almost prophetic of the events of 2020, with the advent of Covid-19, and the rising tide of public concern for Black Lives Matter, the worldwide inability of people who do not fit the “white” demographic to breathe freely. They noted the importance of “the comfort and discomfort of Friends”, that we might be mistaken, reminding us of their importance for us as individuals, and as a Society, as we live adventurously.

Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa New Zealand Te Hāhi Tūhauwiri 2020



Can we learn from the disruption
we have experienced,
and take this opportunity
for all of society
to rethink how we care
for others and the earth?

Peace, in its widest sense, is a calling for all Friends

28

Our Pacific neighbours, Aotearoa - New Zealand, are the only Yearly Meeting to report since the outbreak of Covid-19, and like us, experienced for the first time the difficulties, challenges and sadness of not being able to meet face-to-face, in a time of change, fear and loss.

They see that many of those who are worst affected, often losing their livelihood, are those who were already suffering from the inequality of political and economic systems, globally and nationally, and from the impact of climate change.

They are taking advantage of the trauma of the murderous shootings in two Christchurch mosques last year to link with various ethnic and faith groups, becoming involved in interfaith and cultural activities, and hoping to explore and put aside often unconscious prejudices.

FRANCE October 2018

The Quaker movement does not give in to despair.
On the contrary, Quaker culture builds trust and
empowerment.

In conclusion, we wish you the folly of believing that
the world can be transformed.

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Friends, I hope I have offered sufficient of its aroma and flavour to entice you to sample the smorgasbord that is FWCC website, which you can access via quakersaustralia.info/.

Browsing through these epistles, I am sure you also will be comforted and encouraged that despite our many differences, our similarities continue to bind us.

In closing, I could not resist reminding Friends of the message sent from France in October 2018, reminding us not to despair.

Thank you Friends for your patient and loving listening to the voices of our Friends around the world.